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STEPHEN D. COAN
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Groton Inn Fire Started in the Attic, Possibly Electrical

State Fire Marshal Stephen D. Coan, Groton Fire Chief Joseph Bosselait, Groton Police Chief Donald Palma and Guy Thomas, Special Agent in Charge of the Boston Field Division of the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives announced the findings of their investigation into the fire that destroyed the historical Groton Inn. The fire occurred on the evening of August 2, 2011. The Groton Inn is believed to have been the oldest continually operating inn in the United States.

State Fire Marshal Stephen Coan said, "Sadly many of our national treasures are burning away. This fire underscores the need for us to find ways to protect these buildings for future generations with fire sprinklers. Historic preservation is not inexpensive, but the alternative is also costly as Groton has sadly learned."

Chief Bosselait said, "This fire was a tragic loss for our quintessential New England town. The building was important to our sense of our connection to the generations who had come before."

Area of Origin

Based on photographic evidence and responding firefighter and eyewitness testimony, investigators believe the fire began in the attic in the back of the original building near where it connected to later additions. However, the possibility that the fire started in a pipe chase and traveled to the attic cannot be completely ruled out.

Cause

There was no fire damage in the kitchen ruling out that the fire started there. A lightning strike on the building was also ruled out as the closest one was a mile away that evening. There is no evidence to suggest an intentionally set fire and the part of the building where the fire started was a remote area not readily accessible to humans. This discounts arson as a possible cause. The most likely source of heat in the area of origin is electrical. The fire burned an extensive part of the roof, especially in the area of origin, not leaving

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investigators with enough forensic evidence to test in order to conclusively prove an electrical cause. As a result, the fire will remain officially undetermined in accordance with the national standard (National Fire Protection Association 921) used for fire investigation in Massachusetts.

Investigators from the Groton Fire Department, Groton Police Department, State Police assigned to the Office of the State Fire Marshal and the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) jointly investigated the fire. The ATF frequently joins the investigative team for commercial fire investigations.

Coan said, “Chief Bosselait has indicated he will be bringing a fire sprinkler local option law before town meeting. I look forward to working with him to educate the public about the value of fire sprinklers.”

Fire sprinklers are like having a firefighter in every room. They give people vital time to escape to safety – especially children, older adults or the disabled who may need extra time – by minimizing killer heat and smoke. Sprinklers also control fires until the fire department arrives.